

# Seminaries and the UCC

Seminaries are schools that provide theological education to further the ministry and mission of the Christian Church. The United Church of Christ relates in covenant to seven seminaries and historically to eight others.

## History and Background

One legacy of the Protestant Reformation to the United Church of Christ is the belief that clergy should be educated. The Reformers originally conducted this education in an informal manner with older clergy training one or more people in their homes or studies. As the need for trained clergy increased, colleges and universities assumed that task.

Many of the earliest universities in the United States (including Harvard and Yale) were established primarily for educating clergy. A new system began with the creation in 1807 of Andover Seminary, a graduate professional school requiring a baccalaureate degree for admission. These seminaries were often independent of colleges and universities and operated as separate institutions with their own boards, administration, faculty and endowment.

When the United Church of Christ was formed in 1957, Eden, Mission House and Lancaster seminaries were training clergy of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Andover Newton, Bangor, Chicago and Yankton were seminaries of the Congregational Christian Churches. Other theological schools had provided clergy for these

churches, as well as to a number of denominations: Harvard, Howard, Vanderbilt and Yale Divinity Schools; Pacific School of Religion and Hartford and Union Theological Seminaries.

In 1961 the General Synod of the United Church of Christ expressed its concern about the relationship of the seminaries to the church. Discussions about theological education were held for a decade.

Finally the General Synod decided to designate some schools as **closely related** and others as **historically related**. Subsequently it changed the designation "closely related" to **seminaries of the United Church of Christ**. The denomination would enter into a special covenantal relationship with the closely related seminaries for mutual support and service. The historically related seminaries did not wish to enter into this covenant, but their current and historical contribution was recognized by the church.

Seminaries in covenant are:

- **Andover Newton Theological School**  
210 Herrick Road  
Newton Centre, MA 02159  
800-964-ANTS
- **Bangor Theological Seminary**  
Two College Circle Box 411  
Bangor, ME 04402  
207-942-6781
- **Chicago Theological Seminary**  
5757 South University Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60637  
312-752-5757

- **Eden Theological Seminary**  
475 East Lockwood Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63119  
800-969-3627
- **Lancaster Theological Seminary**  
555 West James Street Lancaster,  
PA 17603  
717-393-0654
- **Pacific School of Religion**  
1798 Scenic Avenue  
Berkeley, CA 94709  
800-999-0528
- **United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities**  
3000 Fifth Street, N.W.  
New Brighton, MN 55112  
612-633-4311

Historically related schools are:

- **Hartford Seminary**  
77 Sherman Street  
Hartford, CT 06105  
203-232-4451
- **Harvard University Divinity School**  
45 Francis Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
617-495-5761
- **Howard University School of Divinity**  
1400 Shepherd Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20017  
202-806-0500
- **Interdenominational Theological Center**  
671 Beckwith Street, S.W.  
Atlanta, GA 30314  
404-527-7700
- **Seminario Evangelico de Puerto Rico**  
Ponce de Leon Avenue 776  
San Juan, PR 00925  
809-751-6483

- **Union Theological Seminary**  
3041 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
212-662-7100
- **Vanderbilt University Divinity School**  
21st Avenue and Grand  
Nashville, TN 37240 615-322-2776
- **Yale University Divinity School**  
409 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511  
203-432-5303

## Common Practices

All seven seminaries of the United Church of Christ, and half its historically related schools, are known as **free-standing**. That means they are independent of control by the denomination or other institutions. They have their own charter, financing and board of directors.

United Church of Christ seminaries are tremendously diverse: Some are located in cities, others in suburbs or small towns; some belong to clusters of eight or nine theological schools, others are far from other seminaries; some are related to universities, most are not; some specialize in particular aspects of ministry while others don't.

The principal function of theological seminaries is to assure a steady flow of well-educated leaders, both ordained and lay, for the total ministry of the church. Most people in degree programs of the seminaries are in training for positions as ordained church leaders-pastors, ministers of Christian education, and ministers to youth, older adults and the local

community. Seminaries also train women and men for many other specialized ministries: teaching; chaplaincies in hospitals, schools, colleges and the armed forces; evangelistic work; urban or rural ministries; mission work at home and overseas; and ministry in a variety of racial/ethnic groups such as Hispanics, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans and African Americans.

Seminaries also educate lay leaders. Several schools have extensive programs to help lay people become more effective in their ministries. Usually the aim is to educate people who can then educate others.

Continuing education for ordained ministers is also a purpose of seminaries. Many clergy return to seminaries regularly for short courses, regular classes or additional degrees. The seminaries offer the structured space needed for reflection, study and new skill development.

Seminaries also serve as a vital resource for the church as it seeks insight into God's will. Seminaries have been diligent in helping the United Church of Christ be faithful to the gospel in relation to issues confronting the church. Faculty and students have contributed through study, reflection and research at seminaries and on committees, boards and agencies of the United Church of Christ.

United Church of Christ seminaries must meet at least the minimum educational requirements

of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, the primary accrediting agency for graduate professional education in ministry. Several of the 15 schools are also accredited by regional secular accrediting bodies. The purpose of accreditation is to assure the church and the general public that a standard of educational quality is maintained. Accreditation assures the church that graduates of these seminaries have been educated about the Christian traditions (Bible, church history, theology) and about the practice of ministry (preaching, teaching, administration, worship). Accreditation also means that graduates have had the opportunity to practice what they have learned under trained teachers and supervisors.

## The Task of the Seminaries

The Ninth General Synod called on the church and its seminaries to join hands in educating new leaders for the church. The Synod said:

The churches need leaders who are committed to the Gospel and are able to proclaim it. They are seeking pastors and teachers who can help persons relate the Faith of the Church to individual and social concerns. The churches seek clergy who understand the pain which is present both in the church and in the world and can face it with hope.'

The task of the seminaries of the United Church of Christ is the education of these women and men.

It is of vital importance to the life and health of the entire church and society.

## Issues Facing the Church

- What is the importance of having leaders trained in seminaries related to the United Church of Christ? Should you encourage students to travel a long distance to attend a seminary related to the United Church of Christ when another is nearby?
- Who determines the role of a seminary?

## Questions

- What is the United Church of Christ seminary nearest to you? What do you know about it?
- What do you know about any three other seminaries?
- What might your church do to know our seminaries better?
- Is any financial support provided by your church to a United Church of Christ seminary? How could support be provided or increased?
- Is your church providing an annual amount equal to 2% of your church's local expense budget to the support of theological education and institutions? If not, how could support be provided or increased?
- When was the last time you invited someone from a UCC seminary to speak to your

congregation about theological education?